

Donnan-Asher Iron Front Building
1207-1211 East Main Street
Richmond
Virginia

HABS NO. VA-853

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

DONNAN-ASHER IRON FRONT BUILDING

Location: 1207-1211 East Main Street (on south side of Main Street between 12th and 13th Streets), Richmond, Virginia.

Present Owner: Hyman Specter and Morris A. Bloom

Present Occupant: (1207) Block Importing Company, Inc.
(1211) Vacant

Present Use: (1207) Warehouse and wholesale distribution center
(1211) None--formerly a store

Statement of Significance: These two commercial row buildings with full cast-iron fronts were erected on East Main Street during the rebuilding of the area following the disastrous fire of 1865.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: c. 1866.
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and subsequent owners:

This information for the Donnan-Asher Iron Front Building has been divided into two parts to facilitate the title-tracing of the property.

a. 1207 East Main Street:

1876 Estate of George W. Allen.

1879 "all that certain Iron Front brick building" and the property that it was located on was sold by Mary Allen Donnan and William S. Donnan to W. H. Scott, a druggist, for the sum of \$12,000. It is stated in this deed that William S. Donnan and John Asher built the building on this property. It was at that time occupied by George Gibson as a storehouse; the upstairs was occupied by Millhiser and Leibermuth. Dr. William H. Scott, a prominent druggist, resided at this time at 102 East Franklin Street, in the famous Linden Row. His drugstore was located further downtown on East Franklin Street. (D.B. 115B, 503-5).

1910 The property known as 1207 East Main Street was

sold by John G. Scott, heir of William H. Scott, to Henry Clarke and wife for \$37,500 (D.B. 207A, 88).

1916 The property known as 1207 East Main Street was sold by Henry Clarke and his wife to H. Clarke & Sons, Inc. in Maryland for \$48,333 (D.B. 242A, 301).

1920 The property known as 1207 East Main Street was sold by H. Clarke & Sons, Inc. to H. Clarke & Sons, Inc. in Virginia (D.B. 266C, 91).

1937 The property known as 1207 East Main Street was sold by H. Clarke & Sons, Inc. to Ray Paris for \$12,000 (D.B. 410B, 335).

1950 The property known as 1207 East Main Street was sold by Ray Paris to the Dart Realty Company, price unlisted (D.B. 528A, 94).

1962 The property known as 1207 East Main Street was sold by the Dart Realty Company to Hyman Specter and Morris A. Bloom for \$20,000 (D.B. 610C, 60).

b. 1211 East Main Street:

1845 John Brockenbrough and others conveyed the property known as 1209 and 1211 (lots #2 and #3) to James G. Brooks and Charles C. Hudson (D.B. 82A, 231).

1849 Charles C. Hudson deeded his share of the property to James G. Brooks.

1866 James G. Brooks sold lots 1209 and 1211, fronting on Main Street between 12th and 13th Streets, to William S. Donnan and John Asher for \$37,500 (D.B. 82A, 231).

1871 In a deed of partition John Asher was allotted the property known as 1211 East Main Street (D.B. 94A, 406).

1872 John Asher sold 1211 East Main Street with "iron front brick tenement", occupied by Ellet and Watkins, to Seligman M. Rosenbaum for \$28,000 (D.B. 99A, 295).

1886 Property known as 1211 East Main Street granted to Michael Rosenbaum in a partition suit (D.B. 132C, 346).

1889 Morton Rosenbaum, appointed special commissioner to sell the property known as 1209 and 1211 East

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Main Street, belonging formerly to Michael Rosenbaum, sold both lots to Charles E. Whitlock for \$55,000 (D.B. 137B, 359). 66.

- 1917 The property known as 1211 East Main Street was allotted in a deed of partition to Elizabeth Whitlock Bird, daughter of Charles E. Whitlock, by the Chancery Court in Bird v. Bird (D.B. 245B, 139).
- 1941 Louis Cooke purchased the property known as 1211 East Main Street from Elizabeth W. Bird (D.B. 425A, 156). Cooke died the same year and left the property to his wife, Teresa Cooke.
- 1963 Property known as 1211 East Main Street was sold by Teresa Cooke Hammrick to Hyman Specter and Morris A. Bloom for \$25,000 (D.B. 622A, 25).

4. Original plans and construction: Brick with metal roof, pine floors, four stories. Elaborate iron work facade.
5. Alterations and additions: In 1968 the front columns of the building were removed, and a new front installed. The rear windows were blocked in, and the interior modernized. This cost \$50,000.

B. Historic Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

After the disastrous evacuation fire of 1865, when fleeing Civil War Troops had set a fire which leveled the area, this row was erected during the subsequent rebuilding of downtown Richmond.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: None.

2. Primary and unpublished sources:

Assessors Records, Richmond City Hall.

Deed Books, Chancery Court, Richmond City Hall.

Richmond City Directories.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Dulaney, Paul S. The Architecture of Historic Richmond.
Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1968.

Munford, Robert Beverlyly, Jr. Richmond Homes and Memories.
Richmond, 1936.

Prepared by (Mrs.) Margaret T. Peters⁶⁶⁻
Researcher
8 April 1969

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The structure is one of the finest and most ornate iron front rows surviving in the city. The four-story facade, in pure Italianate style, is reminiscent of Venetian Renaissance palaces. Until 1966 the facade survived almost completely unaltered, but at that time the central ground-floor shop front was insensitively desecrated by the insertion of a modern entrance, resulting in the removal of all original architectural decoration in those four bays. Despite this unfortunate alteration, the building survives as an excellent example of the Victorian ability to give elegance and character to an essentially utilitarian structure with the use of easily and cheaply produced architectural decoration.

2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: (1207) approximately 169 feet deep; (1209) and (1211) approximately 149-1/2 feet deep. Facade approximately 75-1/2 feet wide. Four stories, twelve-bay front.
2. Foundations: Brick, common bond.
3. Wall construction: Facade: Cast-iron over brick. Side, rear, and partition walls: Brick, common bond.
4. Framing: Heavy, closely spaced joists set in brick walls.
5. Porches: None.
6. Chimneys: Flues set in side and partition walls; chimneys serve no decorative function as they are not visible from ground level.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Old, if not original doorways, to the shopes and stairs survive in the first and fourth ground floor bays from the west. The doors in these openings are simple double doors with single long panes of clear glass in each door. Enframements for original doors survive in the tenth and twelfth bays from the west, but the doors have been replaced by modern ones. The doorways to the center section have been obliterated.

by the installation of a modern shop-front. The doors on the rear of the building are merely functional and serve no decorative purpose.

- b. Windows: The facade of the building is divided into three sections, each containing four bays. The divisions between each section are indicated on the facade by a Corinthian pilaster between the bays rather than an engaged column. The voids of the first or ground floor are separated by Corinthian columns supporting a Corinthian entablature. Between the columns are either the doors or shop windows, but as noted, all of the original architectural features of the central four bays have been destroyed. The second-floor windows are separated by engaged Corinthian columns with pilasters marking the ends of the partition walls. The windows in each bay are arched and are divided into two arched sections with a central support in the Florentine Renaissance manner. All of the windows are topped by a decorative keystone, and all of the windows retain their four-over-four pane sash. The engaged columns and pilasters support an engaged balustrade, the pedestals of which are the pedestals for the engaged Corinthian columns of the third floor. The openings on the third and fourth or top floor are treated in the same manner as those of the second, but the engaged columns flanking the windows on the top floor support the building's entablature.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Shed roof with very shallow slope towards the rear of the building. Tin roof coated with asphalt.
- b. Entablature: Italianate-type entablature with relatively thin architrave and very deep frieze. The frieze is divided by very large scrolled consoles which are aligned over the engaged columns. Each space between the consoles is ornamented with a single rosette. The cornice itself has a very deep projection and is supported by the consoles.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: The first-floor plans of all three sections of the building have been altered from their original state, but it can be assumed that the plans originally consisted of little more than a front show room with a stock room and perhaps an office behind. The plan in 1207 East Main Street has been the least altered.
- b. Upper floors: The upper floors of each section are not

partitioned, but are each one long room running the entire length of the building. Between the third and fourth floor floors in 1211 is a light well surrounded by a balustrade in the center of the floor. 66-

- c. Cellars: Full, unpartitioned cellars in each section.
2. Stairways: An original stairway survives in 1207 and ascends to all floors from its own exterior door in the fourth bay from the west. The original stain on the upper floors of 1211 survives. Both stairways are enclosed by vertical sheathing. Freight elevators in each section are probably located in the positions of the earlier hand-operated elevators.
 3. Flooring: Original wide-board pine floors survive on the upper stories; floors in ground-floor sections are covered with a variety of modern compositions.
 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Ceilings of upper floors of 1207 are exposed joists, and the walls are exposed brick. Tin panel ceilings survive on the first and second floors of 1211. Walls of 1211 are plastered.
 5. Doorways and doors: No original doorways or doors of architectural interest survive.
 6. Decorative features and trim: None of note.
 7. Notable hardware: None of special interest.
 8. Lighting: Buildings originally lit by gas, now lit by electricity.
 9. Heating: Modern oil-fired central heating. Upper floors of structure originally unheated. No original heating devices survive.

D. Site:

General setting and orientation: The building is located on the south side of lower Main Street in a busy, commercial section of the city. It is flanked on either side by architecturally sympathetic structures of similar height and massing.

Prepared by Calder C. Loth
Architectural Historian
Virginia Historic
Landmarks Commission
8 April 1969

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These records are part of the Richmond Photo-Data Project, undertaken 66- in 1967 by HABS in cooperation with the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission. During the period from July, 1967 to October, 1969, records were made of 11 historic structures in Richmond. The project primarily recorded examples of the cast-iron commercial architecture for which the city is known, though other building types are also included.

The project was under the general supervision of James C. Massey, Chief, Historic American Buildings Survey. James W. Moody, Jr., Executive Director, Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission, directed the operation in Richmond. Professor Paul Delaney of the University of Virginia School of Architecture assisted in the selection of subjects covered. Historical and architectural data were furnished by Messrs. Tucker Hill and Calder Loth, Architectural Historians of the Commission's staff. Photographer was Edward F. Heite, also on the staff of the Commission.